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# BOSTON HARBOR - AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The Boston Harbor Associates

December 1978

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***The Boston Harbor Associates:*** In 1973, a coalition of people from Boston's business, academic, civic and planning communities joined together to consider a unique and unrecognized natural and economic resource - Boston Harbor. Calling ourselves the Boston Harbor Associates, we began to take a look at the several hundred acres of surplus federal property on the harbor's edge, the islands which had just been granted "state park" status and the declining seaport.

A community-wide conference was held in June 1975 and a series of public forums in 1977 and 1978. These forums focused on four users of the port - commercial shippers, fishermen, public boat operators, and energy suppliers - and asked who's in charge? . . . how can we coordinate planning and integrate decision-making for future growth?

This report builds on the experience of these meetings and is intended to enlarge the process. We believe in bringing together the decision-makers with those who are affected by their decisions. We are committed to a process whereby private and public interests are jointly served and economic gains are weighed with environmental risks, without stalemate. We believe the long term future is as critical as the immediate present.

## THE BOSTON HARBOR ASSOCIATES

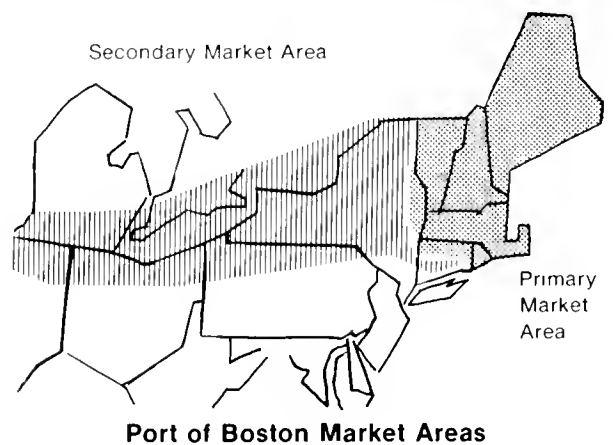
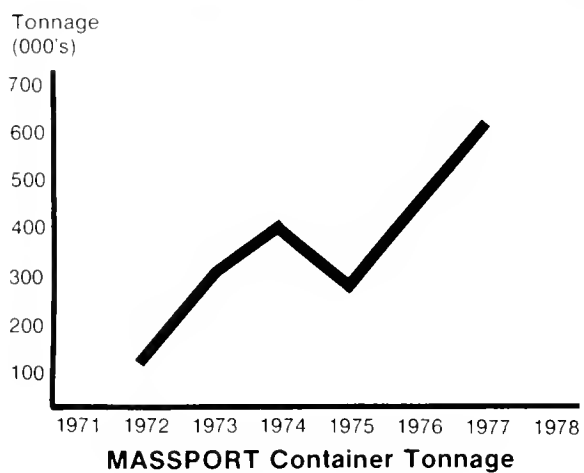
70 LONG WHARF  
BOSTON, MASS. 02110  
523-7684

Arthur Lane, President  
John S. Ames, Staff  
Nancy Wrenn, Staff

Howard Ris, Editor

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*The preparation of this report was funded in part by the Office of Coastal Zone Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, under a program management grant to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*



# The Case For Better Management

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During the past year the Boston Harbor Associates sponsored a series of workshops designed to pinpoint some of the harbor's management problems. The workshops focused on the potential for growth of the harbor's port industries and brought together the various agencies and private interests

involved with those industries. The results from these workshops, as well as from research on other issues conducted by the Associates, are summarized below. We think they illustrate well the need for better management.

## Containerport Expansion

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For many years the Port of Boston experienced a serious decline. In 1971 however the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) opened the Moran Terminal in Charlestown and brought container shipping to the region - at a cost of \$25 million. The investment paid off, as shown on the accompanying graph. **Since 1971 a major resurgence in the volume of trade through Massport's facilities has occurred.**

These trends are expected to continue. Projected tonnage for 1980 ranges from 800,000 to over 1,000,000 tons. Continued growth is also expected in lumber, automobile, and other general cargo imports.

What do these figures mean to the New England economy and to the citizens of the state, apart from their obvious implications for the Massachusetts-based shipping industry? The principal commodities currently imported through the Port of Boston via container include chemicals; food and alcoholic beverages; fabricated metals; electrical machinery; and leather products. Because these goods come through Boston, rather than through out-of-state ports, Massachusetts workers are called upon to perform the many jobs necessary to transform them into marketable products and to get them to the market place. This means income and therefore spending power for longshoremen, shipping agents, custom house brokers, truckers, workers in distributing firms, warehousing and packing plant employees, and workers in ship repair, fueling and other services, thus producing beneficial effects throughout the Massachusetts economy.

**But existing facilities cannot handle the estimated increases in demand for container shipments.** The Moran terminal is currently trying to operate at twice the workload for which it was built. As a result incoming vessels are often forced to lie at anchor in the harbor, while waiting for a free berth. Such delays cost money and motivate vessel owners to divert their ships and cargo to other more efficient ports. Thus, the Port

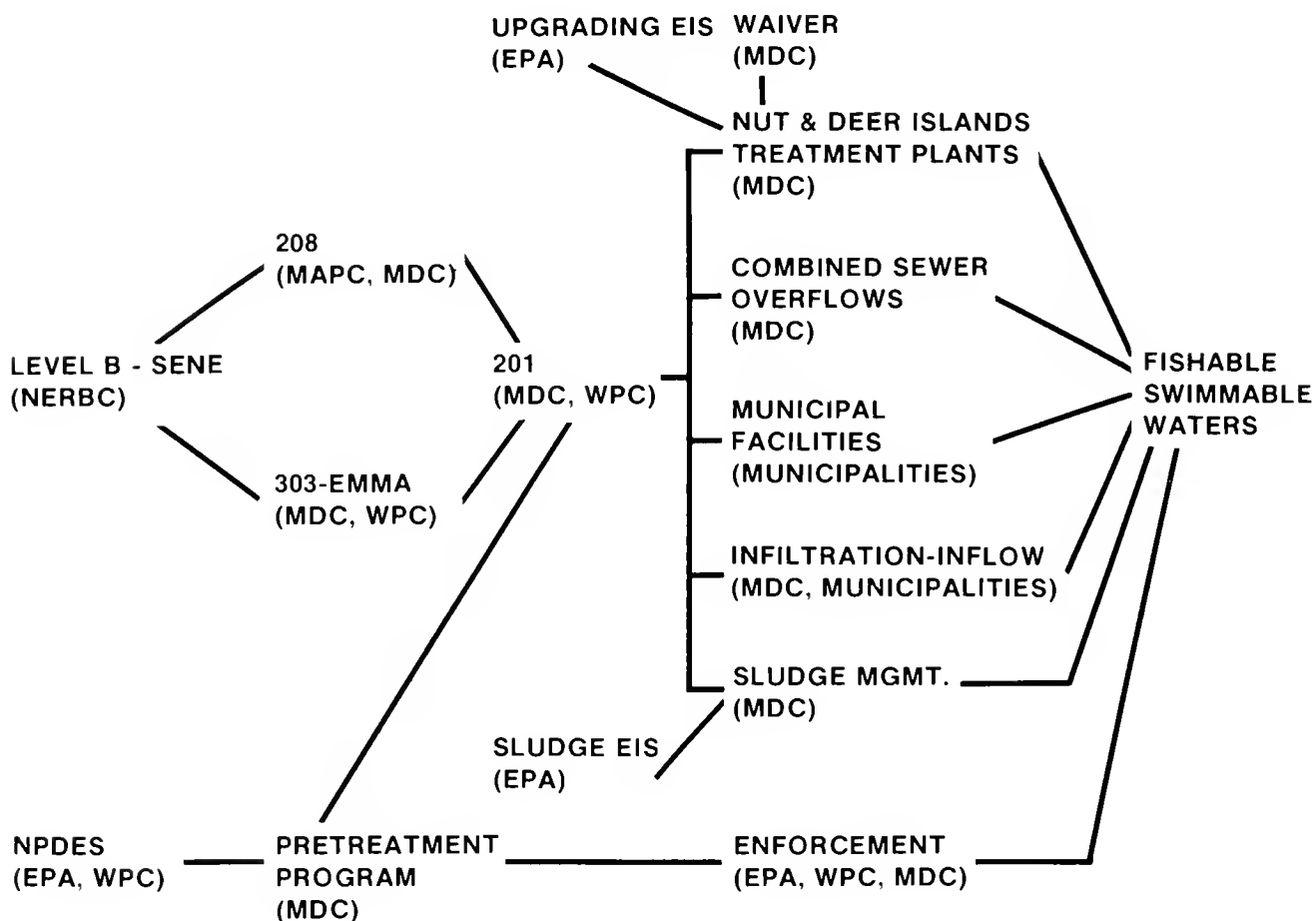
Authority urgently needs to expand its facilities or it will lose its customers. The agency proposed to use a portion of the South Boston Naval Annex site, now owned by the city's Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC). Considered to be the best site for expansion of port facilities in Boston, it is close to the open ocean, there is adequate berthing space and backland storage area, and good rail and road access can be made available without adversely impacting adjacent residential areas.

**Unfortunately, the Port Authority and EDIC have for three years been unable to reach agreement on the terms under which a Massport facility would be integrated into the industrial park being developed by EDIC.** It is a classic example of regional vs. local interests. The Port Authority views development of the site as essential to the continued viability of the port; if it doesn't expand its facilities, shippers will cease to call at the port and the region will lose out on the economic benefits discussed above. EDIC sees more labor intensive activities on the site - hoping to create 3,000 new jobs for city workers and increased tax revenue for the city.

Use of the site for containerport development is advocated by a number of containerport feasibility studies, the White administration's 1977 *Boston Plan* and the state's Coastal Zone Management Plan. In spite of all this support, three years of talks have yielded nothing. The privately owned shipping concerns are now threatening to move their operations to Lynn and the Port Authority has been forced to explore alternatives for reorganizing its limited space on Castle Island.

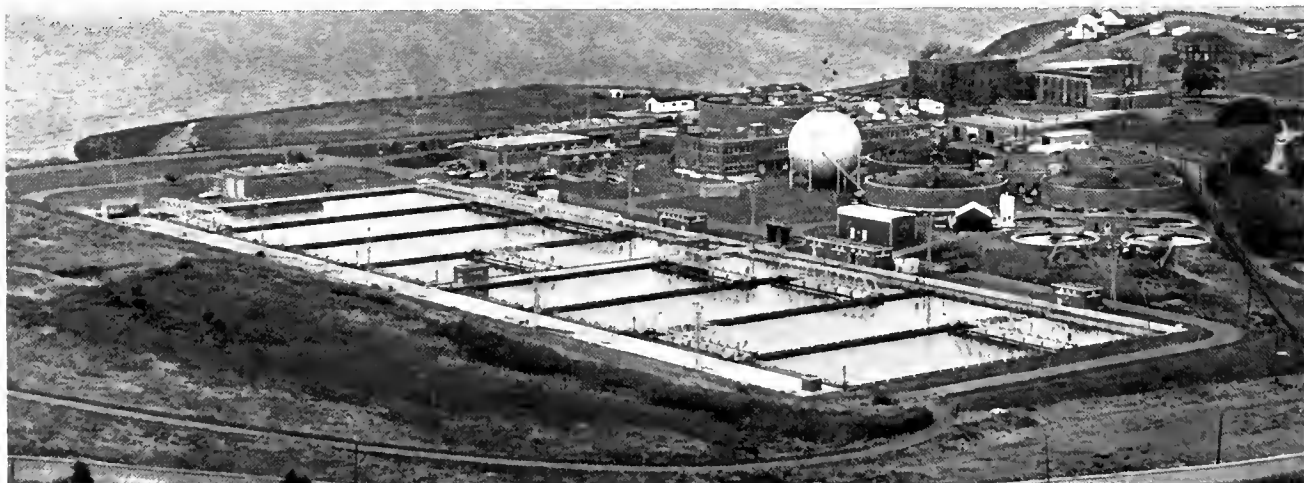
**Such delays need not occur.** But they will as long as there is no one set of established priorities to guide agencies in the use of publicly held lands around the harbor, and as long as there is no mechanism for balancing regional needs against local interests. Had such a framework existed, the original disposition of

# Water Quality Management in Boston Harbor



ACE-Army Corps of Engineers  
 EPA-Environmental Protection Agency  
 MDC-Metropolitan District Commission  
 NERBC-New England River Basins Commission  
 WPC-Division of Water Pollution Control

201-Facilities Planning  
 208-Areawide Water Quality Management  
 303-Basin Planning  
 EIS-Environmental Impact Statement  
 NPDES-National Pollution Discharge Elimination System



Deer Island Sewage Treatment Plant

the South Boston site by the federal government, the financing of the property by the state Land Bank, the creation of the EDIC by the legislature, and the various proposals put forth over the years by the Port

Authority could all have been tied together and carried out as a coordinated action plan that probably would have succeeded in bringing a better seaport to the region *and* new jobs and taxes to the city.

## Harbor Pollution

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Harbor pollution has made the front pages of Boston's major newspapers a number of times in recent years - raw sewage was being discharged directly into the harbor right in the heart of the city's most fashionable redevelopment area! While this disclosure made splashy headlines, it represents only the tip of the iceberg. **In spite of countless studies and millions of spent dollars, little progress has been made in the water cleanup effort.** The future of boating, swimming and other recreational activities in the Harbor remains in doubt.

Beginning with the 1975 EMMA (Eastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Area) study, undertaken jointly by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and the Corps of Engineers, the cleanup effort has become more and more confusing and continues to lack the comprehensive perspective and coordination needed to arrive at a consensus for action.

EMMA's original \$855 million recommendation for upgrading the Deer and Nut Island primary treatment plants to secondary treatment and building two satellite plants on the Charles and Neponset Rivers has now been challenged by a recommendation by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that the region's wastewater be treated at one plant on Deer Island. Meanwhile, MDC has applied to EPA for a waiver which would exempt the Deer and Nut Island plants from having to go to secondary treatment, thereby precluding the need for the new facility. Many citizens, concerned about the negative impacts that any new facilities might have on their communities, feel they have been ignored in the process.

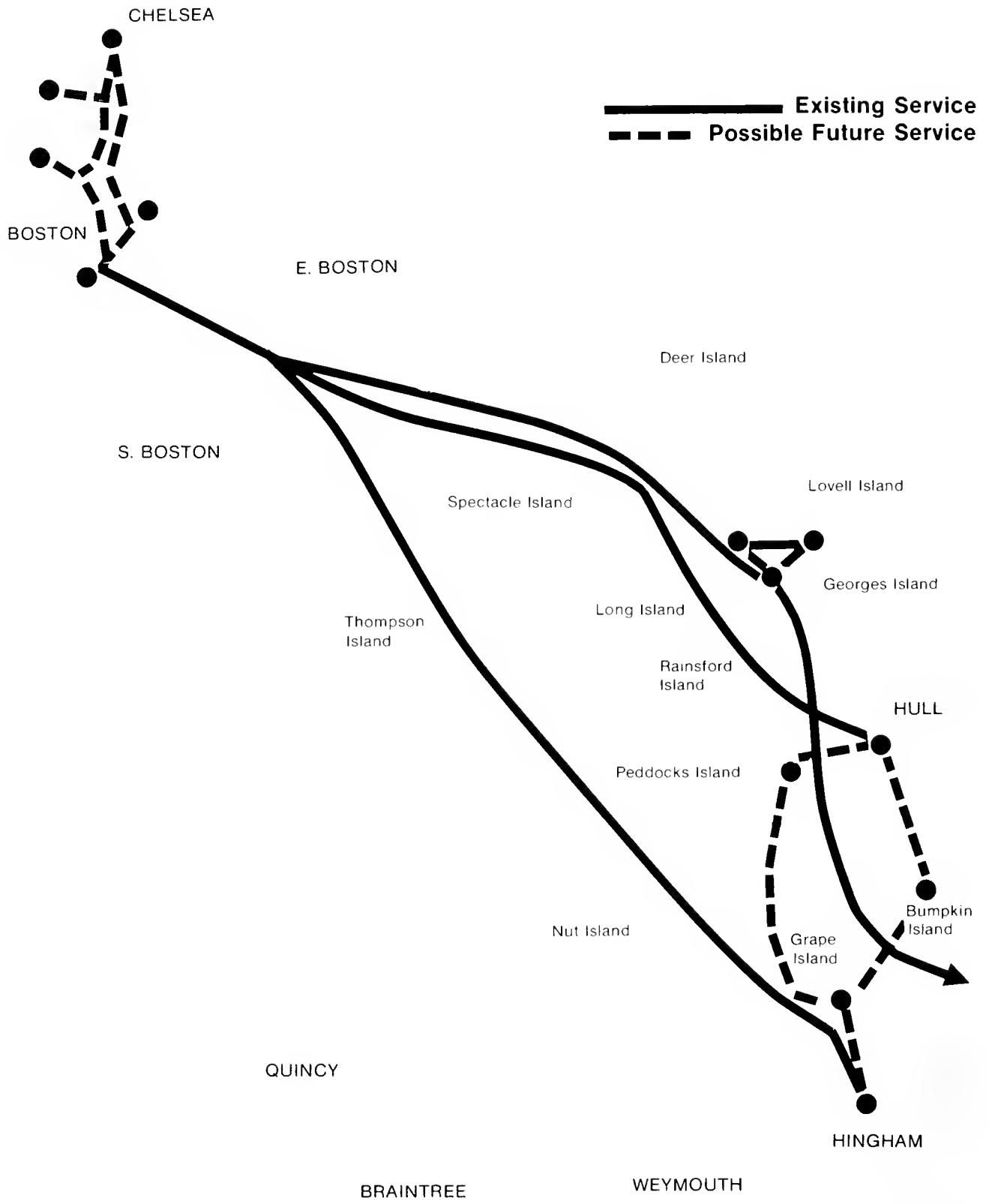
The MDC is now embarking on a study of combined sewer overflow problems (pipes carrying both sewage and stormwater runoff), believed by many to be the major cause of pollution in the harbor. But it is expected to be six years before construction is

completed. EPA is preparing a separate impact statement on alternatives for managing the sludge generated by the existing plants. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council has recently released an areawide plan which is supposed to address the full range of structural and non-structural options for cleaning up water pollution throughout the metropolitan region, yet relies on the now outdated EMMA study for its wastewater treatment recommendations.

Adding to the confusion is a recent review conducted by the National Science Foundation and the Office of Management and Budget which rejects many of the previously proposed solutions, including some facilities now under construction. The consultants who wrote the study claim that the entire program in Boston Harbor has been proceeding without a suitable "Basin Plan" - the crucial plan that is supposed to provide a comprehensive analysis of water quality problems throughout the harbor, identify the water quality goals to be achieved within each segment of the harbor, and define the acceptable levels of pollutants that can be discharged in each of those segments.

**It is now clear that implementation of any solution is a long way off.** Since there isn't any one document or set of agreed upon policies that can be called *the* plan for cleaning up Boston Harbor's waters and since no one federal or state agency appears willing or capable of taking a leading role, it is difficult to conceive how any progress can be achieved. We may assume that the whole project, potentially costing in excess of one billion dollars, will continue in the untracked, inefficient and unproductive manner that has marked it over the years and that the health and safety of the people who use and enjoy the waters of Boston Harbor will continue to be jeopardized.

# Ferry Service In Boston Harbor





# Public Water Transportation

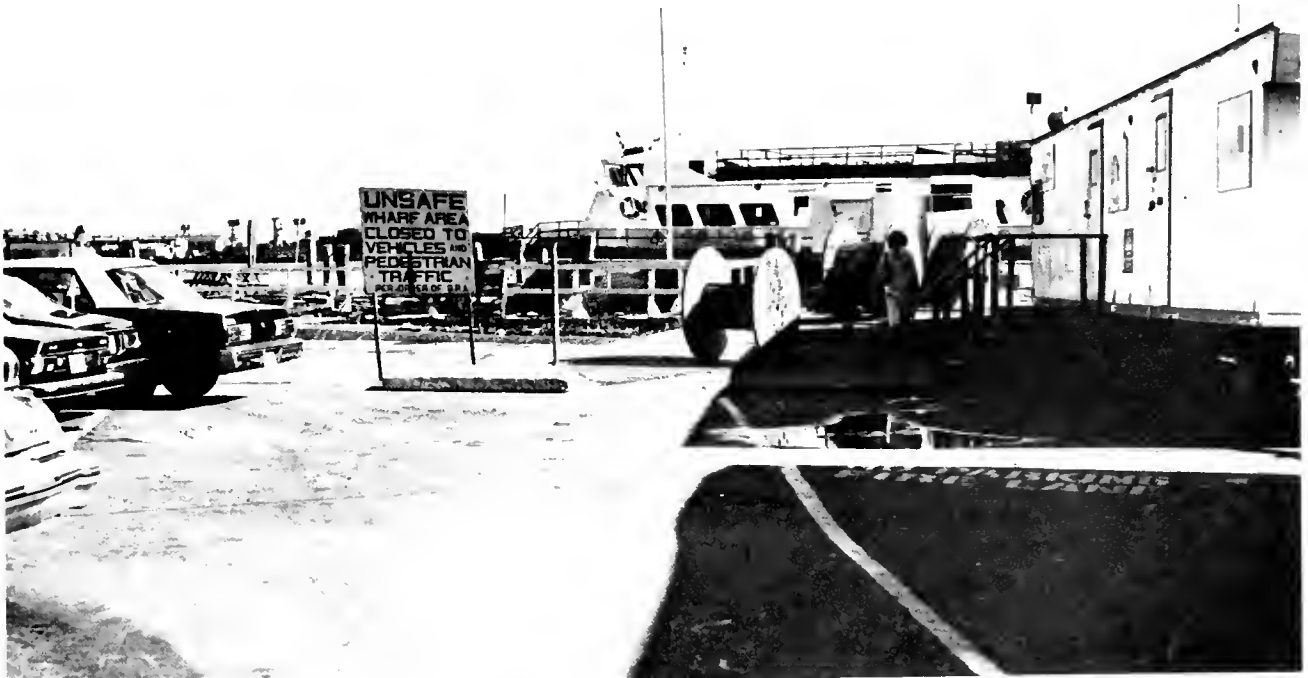
Following a long period of up's and down's in the operation of commuter boat service between Boston and the South Shore, new high speed Hovercraft service came into being this fall. Funded through a million dollar bond issue authorized by the state legislature, the new boat makes the nine mile run in half the time of conventional craft, providing a faster alternative for commuters used to fighting the expressway traffic. Should the trial service attract enough riders to make a permanent investment financially feasible (state transportation planners think it can) a number of important problems that have plagued the ferry program for years will have to be worked out.

**First, the condition of what may be the key to a successful ferry system - the terminals - is deplorable.** Long Wharf, at the foot of State Street and adjacent to the new waterfront park, lays in a state of unsightly disrepair while thousands of excursion boat tourists and visitors to the harbor islands are forced to weave their way through a maze of confusing signs, ticket booths, and moving vehicles. Rowes Wharf, farther down the waterfront and also owned by the city, faces a similar plight. Without a public commitment to rehabilitating the wharves, the private boat operators are reluctant to commit their capital to dockside improvements.

Secondly, there is continuing debate as to which wharf ought to be used for what purpose, and the extent to which service to the South Shore should be combined with service to other points within the harbor. In 1978 75,000 people took the boats from Long and Rowes Wharves to the islands. There is also growing interest in ferry service to the U.S.S. Constitution site in Charlestown, Deer Island, the airport and points in Chelsea and East Boston. With new parks and housing proposed for some of these locations, the concept of a ferry loop around the harbor has begun to take on greater significance.

A third major problem relates to the lack of a lead agency with ultimate authority for managing the entire ferry system. Possibilities include the MBTA with its already troubled public image, the Massachusetts Port Authority with its primary obligation to run its four major facilities at a profit, a new regional transit authority, or a new private steamship authority such as that managing the Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket runs from Woods Hole.

The time has come to find solutions to these problems. The recently initiated hovercraft experiment provides the impetus and the time frame for developing a better managed ferry system that is coordinated under one roof and fully meets the needs of its ridership.



Rowes Wharf



## Boston Harbor Islands State Park

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Legislation passed in 1970 called for all of the islands in Boston Harbor to be acquired and placed under the control of a single agency, the Department of Environmental Management (DEM), then known as the Department of Natural Resources. Eight years hence, management of the Boston Harbor Islands State Park remains fragmented with the reluctance of the MDC commissioners to transfer Peddocks, Georges, and Lovells Islands to DEM and the lack of completed negotiations between DEM and the city of Boston on the transfer of Spectacle, Rainsford and Long Islands.

The islands are clearly of significance to an area larger than the metropolitan region. In fact, tourists from all over the nation as well as the state visit the islands each year. **Thus, the islands belong in the**

**statewide park system run by DEM as a part of the network of new urban parks being developed to promote tourism and better serve the needs of city residents.**

Common sense dictates that placing control of all the islands under one agency would offer economies of scale in planning, operation, and maintenance, particularly when the resources and staff of an entire state park system could be put to use. In addition, single ownership would simplify the administration of day use permits and public information services. Further, the Commonwealth would be in a much better position to go after federal funds which are needed to support the park's development and bring to fruition the comprehensive plan completed over six years ago.

# What's Wrong With The Harbor's Management?

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These examples illustrate only a few of the harbor's many management problems. Other include:

- The incompatibility of a prison, sewage treatment facilities and recreation on Deer Island
- The lack of a harbormaster to police recreational boating and watch over dockside facilities
- Confusion over the licensing implications of the downtown waterfront's "non-navigable" status
- The need to get a debris cleanup program moving
- The need for better seaport access roads in Charlestown and South Boston
- The need to ensure public access to the Fort Point Channel and downtown waterfront areas
- The need to minimize the neighborhood impacts of port development, treatment plants, and other public facilities

**Most of these problems involve publicly owned lands or facilities and/or a multitude of overlapping and conflicting agency jurisdictions. Decision-making to resolve them can usually be characterized as piecemeal, time-consuming and uncoordinated.**

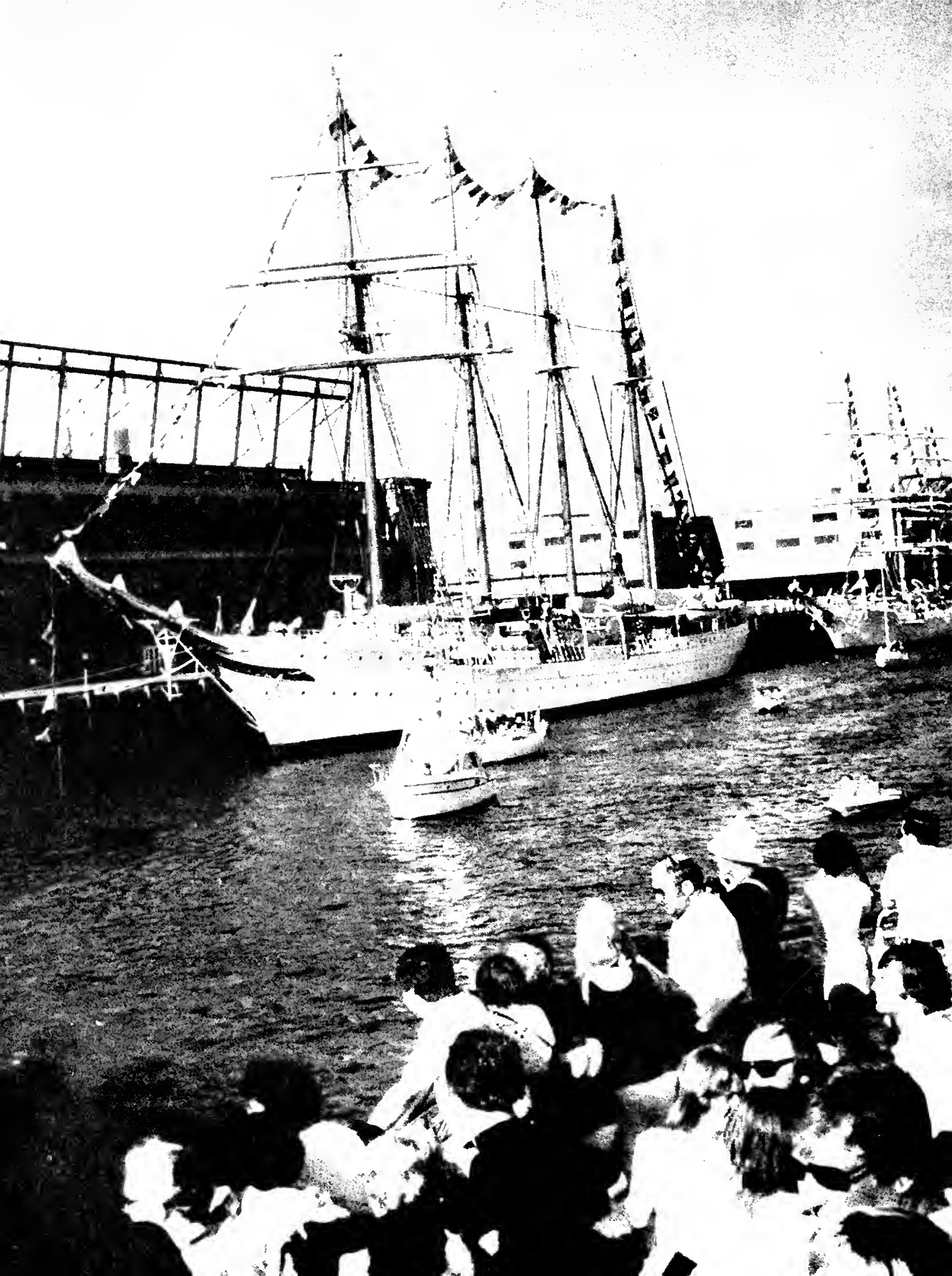
The root of the problem may lie in the fact that most of the agencies operate under legislative mandates that were established long before the harbor's use - and problems - began to approach their current level of complexity. Each agency tries to accomplish its own purpose, whether that be the construction of port facilities to promote regional commerce, the rehabilitation of wharf buildings to accommodate tax and job-producing industries, the development of waterfront recreation areas or the construction of treatment plants.

However, the harbor is a finite resource - its waterfront lands and waters are limited in size and with respect to their ability to support a variety of uses and activities. Thus, agencies sometimes need the same strip of waterfront to achieve different objectives, as in the cases of the South Boston Naval Annex and Deer Island. Without any central coordinating mechanism to determine which objectives ought to have priority, decision-making may take years adding considerably to project costs.

**In other cases, management problems are caused because agency jurisdictions overlap or because their roles or functions aren't clearly defined.** The confusion over the harbor's water quality programs and management of the Harbor Islands by three different agencies are examples here. In each case, there is a real need for one agency to have a strong, undisputed lead role in order to get things moving.

Regulation of private development in the harbor has suffered from this same problem over the years. The recently enacted Coastal Zone Management Program, however, may offer some improvement, as it attempts to unite all of the state's licensing and permitting programs affecting coastal areas under a single coordinated policy framework. Unfortunately that program must deal with the state's entire coastline, and thus is limited in its ability to correct some of the non-regulatory types of management problems that are unique to Boston Harbor and are the subject of this report.

On the local level the city of Boston has taken some steps to coordinate its development activities in the harbor. The *Boston Plan* represents one of the first attempts to recognize the harbor as a discrete resource, and it serves as a coordination mechanism to bring to fruition certain development programs for which planning has already been completed. However, it does not, nor should it, address some of the larger harbor-wide management issues we have been discussing here.



# What Needs To Be Done?

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In the coming year the legislature may be asked to consider a number of bills relating to the harbor, some of which may address specific management problems like the South Boston Naval Annex situation or the need for a harbor-master. Others may be aimed at the regulation of private development, such as an earlier bill which proposed a Boston Harbor Conservation and Development Commission. The Boston Harbor Associates believe however that the time has come for the legislature to take a hard look at the harbor as a whole - to look at the way it's being managed overall, the ways in which public agencies are promoting development as well as regulating it, and most importantly the ways in which public needs are being met, or not met.

TBHA sees the following as the most pressing needs:

■ **There needs to be a clear set of agreed upon priorities to guide public agencies in all development and management actions taken by them in the harbor.** Consensus should be reached on how water-dependent uses can be given priority and how best to integrate public access improvements in waterfront development that is undertaken directly by public agencies or assisted by them in some way. The protection of existing neighborhoods from the adverse impacts of port development or other major public facilities should be a prime concern, as well as the enhancement of the harbor's overall environmental quality. Finally there needs to be a sense of how regional and local needs are to be balanced.

■ **An inventory of all public lands and facilities in the harbor should be conducted together with a forecast of future site needs for facilities like sewage treatment plants, ferry terminals, parks and containership berths.**

■ **An overall Harbor Development Program needs to be formulated based on the priorities and site needs.** The Program should define the ways in which public lands are to be used and the types of public investments or financial assistance that are needed to foster

appropriate private development. All of the major agencies with jurisdiction in the harbor together with the harbor's principal user groups should unite in drawing up the Program.

■ **There needs to be a workable and expeditious process for implementing the Development Program, to ensure that priorities are met and agency actions are better coordinated than they are now.** All agency actions in the harbor ought to be consistent with one another to achieve the best possible use of the harbor's assets.

■ **The roles and functions of the various agencies with jurisdiction in the harbor need to be examined.** A clearer definition of responsibilities is most urgently needed in the area of water quality management. For each of the various functional areas, a lead agency needs to be clearly established, either through administrative or legislative means. That agency should have full responsibility for directing achievement of goals relevant to its functional area.

■ **The process by which private development is regulated should be reviewed to determine if the system recently revised by the CZM Program is working and to determine how best it can be coordinated with the direct development actions of public agencies.**

■ **The input of the harbor's principal users into its planning and management needs to be guaranteed.** Both environmental and economic interests should be adequately represented in the decision-making process.

The Boston Harbor Associates have filed a bill with the legislature which calls for the establishment of a special commission to address these needs. We think the importance of Boston Harbor to the region and the state and to the people who use and enjoy it warrants such action. **The public deserves a harbor whose assets are well managed, developed to meet a variety of economic, social and recreational needs, and protected for years to come.**



### ***Credits:***

Design and Graphics: Robert Sabbatini, Howard Ris

Photos:

Boston Harbor Aerials-Aerial Photos of New England, Inc.  
Deer Island Treatment Plant-MDC Public Information Office  
Ferry Boat-Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management  
Rowes Wharf-Howard Ris  
Sailboats-Boston Sailing Center  
Others-The Boston Harbor Associates



